



CEPPS/NDI Quarterly Report: April 1 to June 30, 2005

ETHIOPIA: ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION USAID Associate Cooperative Agreement No. 663-A-00-04-00437-00, under the Leader Cooperative Agreement No. DGC-A-00-01-0004-00

Project Dates: October 1, 2004 to July 31, 2005

I. SUMMARY

Since 1991, Ethiopia has been transitioning from a totalitarian state. Open elections have been conducted since 1995, but were tainted by irregularities and a widespread boycott of the 2000 and 2001 polls. Although conditions improved in the run-up to the 2005 elections, some uncertainties continued to exist around a range of electoral issues, and political parties threatened to boycott if conditions for a free and fair election were not established.

With U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) support, the National Democratic Institute (NDI or the Institute) was conducting a program to increase political participation and enhance public confidence in the electoral process for the 2005 national elections. NDI's program filled an important gap in current support by seeking to meet the following objectives: to demonstrate domestic and international interest in and support for a transparent and fair electoral process in Ethiopia through an international elections monitoring effort; to identify potential challenges to a transparent and fair electoral process and recommend ways to enhance the process; and to facilitate dialogue between political parties and electoral stakeholders to aid in resolving disagreements prior to the May 2005 elections.

The Institute was focusing activities in two areas: conducting an international election monitoring effort of the 2005 national elections; and, should it be necessary, facilitating a consultative forum between the National Elections Board of Ethiopia and political parties. However, at the end of this quarter, the Government of Ethiopia expelled NDI and its CEPPS partners, the International Republican Institute (IRI) and IFES from Ethiopia. The May elections are surrounded by controversy, and results have yet to be declared. NDI continue to monitor events in Ethiopia and remains in close contact with its CEPPS partners.

II. BACKGROUND

In 1991, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) toppled a military dictatorship and vowed to make a clean break with the country's long history of authoritarian rule. The Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) quickly organized regional and local elections in 1992 followed by an election to select the members of the Constituent

Assembly in 1994. A year later in 1995, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia held its first multiparty elections at the national level. The EPRDF, a coalition of numerous ethnically-based parties, swept the elections and has continued to dominate the political life of the country. As it controls all of the regional councils, the EPRDF also holds sway over the 108-member House of Federation whose members are chosen by the councils. The EPRDF holds nearly 90 percent of the 547 seats in the House of People's Representatives enabling it to select the prime minister.

EPRDF domination is due in part to ongoing government intimidation and harassment of opposition parties and arbitrary detention of their members. However, this trend also reflects the opposition's tendency to boycott elections such as those held in 1994 and 1995 and otherwise opt out of the political process in protest of what they consider to be an uneven playing field. The government of Ethiopia has made some political progress recently as evidenced by improved administration of elections, increased public debate around political issues, and other minor concessions to opposition demands such as increased access to state-owned media. However, implementation of reforms has been inconsistent. Prime Minister Meles continues to state his government's commitment to democratization. The Ethiopian constitution, considered by many to be one of the most progressive in Africa, guarantees a democratic order and respect for human and democratic rights.

Many in the international community saw the 2005 national and regional elections as a critical litmus test of whether the government's rhetoric will be matched by its actions. Past elections have been a source of conflict marked by irregularities such as intimidation of voters and bias on the part of polling officials who are drawn from the country's civil service. In contravention of the Penal Code, the vast majority of electoral offenses have gone unpunished. Given this context, international observation was to provide objective analysis of the overall electoral process and fill an important gap in election-related assistance currently being provided by other donors and implementing partners. Assistance in facilitating dialogue between political parties that have threatened to boycott the polls and electoral stakeholders would have allowed the two groups to discuss election related disagreements and enhance the confidence and the integrity of the electoral process.

Within this context, NDI's program aimed to:

- demonstrate domestic and international interest in and support for a transparent and fair electoral process in Ethiopia through an international elections monitoring effort;
- identify potential challenges to a transparent and fair electoral process and recommend ways to enhance the process; and
- facilitate dialogue between political parties and electoral stakeholders to aid in resolving disagreements prior to the May 2005 elections.

On March 30, the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs expelled NDI, IRI and IFES from Ethiopia, giving them 48 hours to leave the country. The purported reasons for expulsion was that the three organizations were not legally registered as non-governmental organizations (NGOs); that they had not informed the Government of Ethiopia (GOE) of their planned activities; and that staff were traveling under tourist visas. This decision was made despite the

fact that all three groups had made attempts to lawfully register; that numerous meetings had been held between the three democracy organizations and representatives of the GOE, both in Addis Ababa and in Washington, DC; and that the partners' staff were traveling on lawful business visas.

The election and its aftermath have been fraught with controversy but it is difficult for NDI to make any statements based only on information obtained in the press.

III. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Since expulsion, NDI has been monitoring the situation in Ethiopia from DC and meeting with a range of stakeholders. The Institute spent the first part of this quarter urging appropriate reaction from NGOs, policy groups and lawmakers to the CEPPS partners' expulsion from Ethiopia.

NDI has also maintained communication with USAID and Embassy staff in Washington, DC and Ethiopia.

IV. RESULTS/ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The overall goal of the program is to enhance public confidence and participation in the electoral process for the 2005 national elections. Specific program objectives were:

Objective 1: To demonstrate domestic and international interest in and provide information concerning the overall legitimacy and support for a transparent and fair electoral process in Ethiopia;

Objective 2: To identify potential challenges to a transparent and fair electoral process and recommend ways to enhance the process; and

Objective 3: To facilitate dialogue between political parties and electoral stakeholders to aid in resolving disagreements prior to the May 2005 elections.

NDI has no results to report at this time.

V. EVALUATION

NDI is unable to evaluate this program at this time.

VI. FUTURE ACTIVITIES

It is uncertain that this program will continue and, at present, it would be difficult for NDI to play a constructive role in Ethiopia given the current political environment. NDI will remain in close consultation with USAID and its CEPPS partners and continue to monitor political developments from Washington.